

Bangladeshis deplore US strike on Iraq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People from all walks of life reacted sharply yesterday to the US-led attack on Iraq and termed it "unjustifiable and illegitimate".

The shock wave of the attack was felt in Dhaka when law-enforcing agencies kept roads leading to diplomatic zones off-limits to public.

Small groups brought out processions protesting the US invasion on Iraq. People in small groups gathered in front of shops where radio or television was available for latest updates on the US-British invasion on Iraq.

Some local newspapers brought out telegram in the afternoon after the US attacked Iraq.

Different socio-cultural, political and business organisations in separate statements yesterday condemned the US-led attack on Iraq.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA) expressed concern over the Iraq war and said it will badly affect the country's ready-made garments export.

"Many of the importers have refrained from opening letters of credits (LCs) against import of ready-made garments due to worry over war," BGMEA President Kazi Moniruzzaman said in a statement.

They are maintaining a 'wait and see' policy for export order.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) at a meeting called upon people from all walks of life to raise voice against the US-led aggression on Iraq.

CPB leaders said the practice of peaceful crisis solution through the United Nations Security Council came to an end following the US attack on Iraq.

Gano Forum, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), Jatiya Gano Front, Communist Kendro, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Bangladesh Chhatra Kendro, Doctors Against War, South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism & Communalism, Sylhet Development Council also issued statements condemning the US invasion on Iraq.

Cross section of people termed the attack as brutal and uncivilised and defiance to the United Nations peace process.

"It's a wrong war and a wrong way of showing supremacy," said Shabbir Ahmed, a student of Dhaka University. "We know it for sure that it is nothing but an US trick to have its hand on Iraq's oil reserve," he added.

None has given mandate either to the US president Bush nor British prime minister Tony Blair for the so called 'free Iraq from dictatorship', said Tasmid Jahan, a housewife.

"This is an extreme case of unjust brutality," said Najr Irfan, a BBA student of North South University.

Ashiq Alam, a Bangladesh student at University of Windsor, Canada said "Since this war is without the backing of the UN, it is unfair and illegal. President Bush needs an excuse since the US economy is at an all-time low - if he can't get some excuses, chances of him being re-elected are slim", he added.

Hasina demands punishment to Tapan's killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina demanded exemplary punishment to the killers of Tapan Bhattacharya when she visited the Thakurbari at Komorpur village in Bagerhat yesterday.

She also addressed a rally at the nearby primary school where she alleged that those who killed Tapan and raped women of his family were members of the four-party alliance.

Hasina called for a united movement to unseat the present government from power. "We want to get rid of the unholy Khaleda-Nizami alliance. The four-party alliance government has no right to remain in power captured through polls rigging," she said.

Former state minister Dr Mozammel Hossain who is president of Bagerhat district Awami League presided over the rally.

The rally was addressed by, among others, Sheikh Helaluddin MP.

Hasina consoled members of the bereaved family and spent half an hour with them.

On her way back to the capital via Khulna, she went to Khulna Medical College Hospital to see the rape victims.

Save Panam Nagar heritage, demands Sonargaon rally

BACK FROM PANAM, Sonargaon

Local volunteers of the Hunger Project - Bangladesh, at Sonargaon demanded conservation of Sonargaon's historical Panam Nagar.

The demand was put forward at a rally held at the Sonargaon Jubo Sangopremises yesterday.

"I want proper conservation of the Panam Nagar which is a part of our heritage," said Jharna, a student of class eight of G.R. Institution School.

Lacking proper conservation, the 52 years old archaeological structures at Panam Nagar are now in dilapidated condition.

Economist Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed proposed that Sonargaon municipality should post the historical records of the buildings identifying these structures so that people would know their history.

He also emphasised preservation of historical sites all over the country.

Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar said the main responsibility to conserve the sites lies with the locals.

Among others, Prof. Ayesha Begum of Dhaka University, architect Saiful Haq, Dr. Ayasha Khatun, Prof. AKM Shahnewaz, Dr. Meher-e-Khoda, Moniruzzaman Monir and Shamsuzzoha Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion.

Later, they brought out a procession that went through the Panam Nagar area and ended at the municipality office.

Bagerhat brutality Top Jubo Dal men 'involved'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two top pro-BNP Jatiyatubadi Jubo Dal leaders were allegedly involved in the murder and rape of three women at Komorpur village of Jatrapur union under Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

The alleged Jubo Dal leaders are Baig Moazzem Hossain Sabu, president of Sadar upazila unit of the party, and Haroon Shaikh.

Iddris Shaikh, Anis and Kalu Shaikh in their confession have made it clear that the murder of Tapan and gangrape of the three women was planned. They also said that the Komorpur tragedy was the result of an internal rift of the Bagerhat BNP unit.

President of Bagerhat district BNP MAH Selim, MP, said Baig Mozzem and Haroon Shaikh were no longer with the ruling party.

Four army men

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Mohammad Ashiqur Rahman. He will serve the term in an army jail.

The accused extorted money confining businessmen and inflicting mental torture on them. They were also accused of violating military law and giving false statements.

The court martial led by Lt. Col. Rabiul Matin Chowdhury judged the case at the Savar cantonment. The court started the trial in February and concluded on March 5.

The captain and two of his soldiers were withdrawn from duty on February 9 following statement by a police informant that they had extorted money from a businessman on January 29.

Captain Atiq and his team went to Shyamoli bus stand by army jeep and picked up an Indian hundi trader. They released the trader on payment of Taka 3 lakh.

The captain, his cousin Dulal, the soldiers, the jeep driver, the police informant and Bangabazar businessmen shared the booty.



PHOTO: STAR

A man shouts protests against the US-led invasion attack on Iraq, while other demonstrators carry anti-war placards in Dhaka yesterday.

Sleeping Baghdad bombed

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US and British troops and civilians immediately donned chemical protective suits and air raid sirens blared in Kuwait City. Throughout the day, sirens blew off and on.

Iraq said a civilian was killed in the pre-dawn attack. Reporters were taken to a hospital in Doura, a southern suburb of the capital, to show civilians wounded in the strike.

Immediately after the attack, Saddam in a "live" television address vowed to fight and defeat the "reckless and criminal" Bush.

"You, Iraqis, will be victorious... Your enemies will be in disgrace and shame," a tired-looking Saddam said.

He appealed to Muslims to go for Jihad (holy war) against the US.

Addressing the nation over television, Bush said these are the opening stages of what will be a broad and concerned campaign.

"Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force. And I assure you this will not be a campaign of half measures and we will accept no outcome but victory," he said.

The declaration of war brought fierce criticism from world leaders yesterday, as Russia accused the US of committing "a big political mistake" and France expressed its "regret" over the strikes.

China launched a scathing attack on the US, saying the war is an illegitimate conflict and violation of the norms of international behaviour.

In Baghdad, a city already crouched in its shell in war apprehension, streets were empty on an eerie quiet morning after the attack. People expecting fiercer strikes preferred to stay home.

Ambulances wheeled through the city streets. Electricity and water supplies were still in place. The presidential palaces were still intact and were not targeted. The Iraqi flag was flying there.

More than 600 US combat aircraft are within striking distance of Iraq, operating from five aircraft carriers and land bases across the Gulf region, Pentagon officials said.

Nearly 180,000 US and British troops, meanwhile, have been straining at the leash in northern Kuwait, awaiting the word to lunge into southern Iraq in tanks, armoured fighting vehicles and assault helicopters.

B-2 bombers alone can strike up to 16 targets in a single pass with 2,000 pound satellite guided bombs. The B-1 bombers can hit 24 separate targets. And the B-52 can fire air-launched cruise missiles or unload a dozen 2,000 pound satellite-guided bombs along with cluster munitions. Tomahawks were fired from six

Cry for greens

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The contractors are also learnt to have prepared a list of New Colony residents who are opposing the project. The residents fear the contractors may even cancel their colony accommodation by exerting influence.

The New Colony, with decent civic amenities like playground and open spaces, was built in the 1950s for government officials.

The contractors yesterday engaged more than 300 labourers to speed up construction. By 10:00am, the labourers dug up one third of the playground and spaces between the colony buildings. Every tree-covered space was being cleared.

The protesters also moved inside the colony, shouting slogans and urging the labourers to stop digging.

Locals alleged that two contractors, Bachchu and Tutul, also owners of a city bus service, have set up an illegal bus terminal in front of the Shaheed Minar of the colony, where 26 buses are parked every night. They accused officials of the housing department's Mohammadpur division of conniving with the contractors.

"We are not constructing on the playground," said Ekramuzzaman, a housing department member engineer. "We are just using a portion of the playground."

Ekramuzzaman says he does not know how much the project will cost.

However, an assistant engineer at the Mohammadpur division said the initial cost of the project was estimated at Tk 57 crore. But the project was revised and the cost went up, he said.

US surface warships and submarines in the opening strikes, a Navy spokeswoman in Washington said.

Lieutenant Commander Mike Brown, spokesman for the navy's northern Gulf battle group, said the missiles were aimed at "targets of opportunity," and that more than 10 were directed at least two targets.

The destroyer USS Milius, the cruisers USS Cowpens and USS Bunker Hill, and the submarines USS Cheyenne and USS Montpelier also fired missiles, the spokeswoman said.

The limited scope of the strikes and the riskier near-dawn raids prompted speculation that the US military was responding to unexpected, time-sensitive intelligence, possibly on the movements of whereabouts of Saddam Hussein.

"They decided not to wait, to go after Saddam Hussein now," said Loren Thompson, a military analyst at the Lexington Institute.

Oil prices plunged in London and Asia, where the dollar slid against other major currencies. Stock markets rose moderately in Asia, slid on opening in Europe and then picked up.

The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries reiterated that the oil-producing organisation was ready to make good any shortage of oil to the market.

Al Hiqma men

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The four still to be nabbed are Al Hiqma's leader Sayed Kawasr Hussain Siddiqi, Rabiul Islam, Abdul Hannan and Mojibur Rahman.

The case has been filed under sections 123 (Ka) and 124 (Ka) of Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC) for their alleged involvement in anti-state activities.

Sub-inspector Shamsuddin of Detective Branch filed the case with Baolaha thana after the home ministry clearance reached on Wednesday.

Talking to the Daily Star, Assistant Police Commissioner Wajed Ali said more people might be accused in the case before submission of a charge sheet within a day or two.

Police said the organisation's constitution, declaration and other documents so far recovered indicate its subversive motives.

All the four except Abdus Sobhan were quizzed by a joint interrogation cell in Dhaka.

Hearing on Sobhan's remand will be held at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court on March 25.

The government banned the organisation on February 9.

Female worker

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ries inside CEPZ for around an hour.

Police and witnesses said, the accident occurred when a bus carrying employees and workers ran over the three female garments workers at some 300 yards off CEPZ main gate at around 8am.

Nazma was killed on the spot; her two injured companions were admitted to CEPZ medical centre and later shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) upon deterioration of condition.

Agitation, erupting with news of the accident, suspended work at several factories until CEPZ authority brought the situation under control with the help of police. CEPZ authority formed a 3-member committee to probe into the accident. The committee has to submit its report within 7 days.

Sources said, Nazma, who hailed from Jhalokathi in Barisal, had recently resigned from her job at Link Fa and was in CEPZ yesterday for a better job in another firm.

Injured Morsheda and Rekha were workers of Univogue and Multi-sul respectively. Nazma's brother-in-law, Md. Jamal, filed a case with concerned Bondor thana accusing the driver.

Food minister denies Aman shortfall claims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday dismissed reports of Aman shortfall and claimed the production target was achieved last season.

High rice prices in markets has nothing to do with output, Agriculture Minister Matiuur Rahman Nizami told a press conference yesterday.

There was no peculiarity in rice price hike as prices of all other essentials rose, he added.

Quoting growers and traders, local press carried reports that Aman shortfall resulted in price spiral and the country witnessed five times rise in rice import in the current fiscal (2002-03) compared to the last.

Nizami said: "As against 114.58 lakh metric tons of production target, the country grew 15.59 lakh metric ton Aman" according to primary report of the Department of Agriculture Extension. BBS (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics) also predicted Aman output to be 114 lakh metric ton."

The minister argued that comparing to price rise-pattern of other essentials in the country, the prices of rice did not soar in the same pace over the years.

"We've to always hit a balance between the conflicting interests of rice producers and consumers," he added.

Agriculture Secretary Ayub Quadri, who was assisting the minister at the briefing, denied any relation between the huge rice import and production shortfall. "The import surge does not necessarily represent production shortfall, rather I'll attribute the rise in import to 'trade reasons.'" If the importers find rice from across the borders cheaper in rate, they may import rice for marketing in higher prices."

Asked about the failure in Aman procurement this year when the government bought 20 percent of the target, Nizami acknowledged that the government made delay in beginning the drive.

Despite drying up food reserve

and lower than expected flow of food aid, the minister asserted that Bangladesh would not face any trouble in food security as a fallout of the war in Iraq.

He, however, acknowledged that a substantial quantity of the US-committed four lakh metric ton wheat meant for Bangladesh was already redirected to drought-torn Africa and the government's food grain stock stood at only 6 lakh metric ton, 2.5 lakh metric ton down from expected food security-level of 8.5 lakh metric ton.

"But food reserve will pick up soon with the beginning of wheat and boro procurement drives. Besides, gradual shifting of food-aid programmes to cash-aided programmes will give us some relief too," Quadri added.

On the question of probable boro crop loss, the agriculture minister said though many seedbeds were hit by prolonged winter in December, boro output would be satisfactory ultimately.

Asked about scarcity of pesticides used to kill stem borers at the peak season of boro cultivation, Quadri said there were some problems over registration of some ingredients of pesticides that enjoy exemption of duty on import.

"We asked companies to produce necessary papers before us by June 30 and till that time they're allowed to import the ingredients. But one company which has no registration in its name for importing ingredients of a certain pesticide will not enjoy the duty exemption," explained Quadri asserting that unlike past the agriculture ministry was now going tough with application of pesticide laws.

State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) Nurul Alam and Director General of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Nurul Islam Bhuiyan were, among others, present at the briefing.

Life goes low

FROM PAGE 1

Half an hour later, a second series of bombings struck the south-east of Baghdad. AFP journalists saw an enormous ball of fire and black smoke rising up from the site.

The downtown area was spared by the missiles which seemed to strike the city perimeter but it was impossible to determine the targets from the vantage point of town.

As soon as calm returned to the city, wailing sirens announced the end of the alert.

Most families seemed to have remained indoors, their ears glued to radios in a country where the population does not have access to satellite TV channels, which are prohibited by the regime.

Um Mustapha, a housewife who had remained awake overnight to hear the expected outbreak of the war on her small radio, told AFP: "We were not scared because we expected it, but we are scared of what is to come."

Some stands were selling fruit and vegetables while half-empty double-decker buses in imperial red were following their normal routes.

Garbage trucks began making their rounds but raced to safety as soon as the sirens sounded.

Boys played ball in the streets, taking advantage of the lack of traffic.

But most people took shelter,

knowing that massive raids were on their way.

On normally bustling Rasafi Street, the market was deserted. Only two men were there, in front of cart filled with plastic sandals and waiting for the next raid.

"I have to keep living even if there is a war. I sold one pair since this morning but I will stay here, maybe once the fear passes, more people will come to buy," said Adnane.

Sellers of gas tanks were doing a brisker business after setting up a trailer on Midane Street.

Anxious about the length of the war, Baghdadis were stocking up on everything they could.

"The beginning of the day was good. In the hour after the first bombs, we sold 180 -- that is extraordinary," Hihab said.

Little by little, the city began moving again. Party militia began to stand down and sat on the sidewalk for a cup of tea while women, covered in traditional long black dress, went shopping.

Near a bus station, Mr. Hanna's pharmacy was open.

"There are many people, particularly the poor, who need us. That is why I decided to open today," he said.

He added that demand had been particularly high for medication against diarrhoea, migraine and spasms, a common sign of anxiety," he said.

998 fly back home

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the National Road Transport Association of Bangladesh (NRTAB) and the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) have taken measures to take the returnees home safe.

Buses -- each having five reserved seats for them -- will transport them home from Dhaka free, says a press release of the NRTAB.

The BIWTC has also taken steps to make their travels hassle-free. The passengers may call the control room at 9558000.

"The government is fully prepared to tackle any emergency situation," said State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam.

The immigration and customs authorities have been instructed to speedily clear the returnees and help them stay at the camp, he said.

The government is still not sure how many workers will come back. "The number of returnees will not be large if the war remains confined to Iraq," said the state minister.

In the worst scenario, some 200,000 Bangladeshis may be evacuated from the Middle East and the International Organisation for Migrants (IOM) has agreed to assist.

A high-powered government delegation led by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan visited the airport and the camp on Wednesday to review preparation for handling any emergency.

"The control room will remain open round the clock and provide assistance to returnees," said Dalil Uddin Mondal, secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment.

Mondal said he had been in touch with all the Bangladesh embassies in the Middle East and there was no report of Bangladeshi workers assembling in any country bordering Iraq.

Embassy officials in Saudi Arabia visited the bordering areas and found no signs of panic or possibility of emergency evacuation by Bangladeshi workers.

The embassy has formed a three-member committee to handle any emergency.

Dhaka regrets war

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh condemns the missile attack on Baghdad, the foreign secretary said, "We are committed to a peaceful solution."

"We're closely monitoring the developments minute by minute and we'll keep you updated of our reaction as the situation evolves."

When his attention was drawn to the comment made by the Iraqi foreign minister that "Bangladesh is an agent of Bush for extending alleged un diplomatic gesture towards an Iraqi diplomat at the Zia International Airport recently," Mubin Chowdhury said, "Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent state and acts accordingly."